

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 12253 131502Z

51

ACTION NEA-16

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PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3889

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: SPECULATION THAT MRS. GANDHI MAY CALL A SNAP POLL

1. RUMORS ARE CIRCULATING WIDELY IN NEW DELHI THAT MRS. GANDHI IS PLANNING TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT AND CALL A SNAP POLL FOR EARLY NEXT YEAR, RATHER THAN WAIT FOR THE 1976 WHEN ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED TO BE HELD FOLLOWING THE EXPIRATION OF THE PRESENT PARLIAMENT'S FIVE-YEAR TERM. THE BASIS OF THE SPECULATION IS THAT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WILL BE EVEN MORE MASSIVE IN 1976 THAN IN EARLY 1975. IF PRESENT ECONOMIC MEASURES FAIL TO HALT THE PRESENT ECONOMIC DETERIORATION, THE PRIME MINISTER MAY BE FORCED TO TAKE ACTIONS DURING 1975 (I.E., AN AGRICULTURAL INCOME TAX ON WEALTHY FARMERS) THAT WOULD PROVE HARMFUL AT THE POLLS IN 1976. SOME POLITICAL PUNDITS ALSO STATE THAT THE CONGRESS CAN FIND THE FUNDS AND ORGANIZE ITSELF FOR ELECTIONS SWIFTLY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE OPPOSITION IS IN DISARRAY AND FUMBLING FOR GREATER UNITY WHICH IS POSSIBLE (IF NOT LIKELY) BY 1976 BUT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE BY EARLY 1975. ANOTHER HYPOTHESE IS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER COULD USE AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO DIRECT ATTENTION OF BOTH POLITICIANS AND VOTERS TOWARD THE HUSTINGS OVER THE THREE OR FOUR TIGHT MONTHS AHEAD. (COMMENT: THE PRIME MINISTER MAY ALSO BE ALLOWING AN ELECTION BALLOON TO FLOAT FOR

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 12253 131502Z

THE SAME REASONS AND TO INSPIRE LOYALTY AMONG CONGRESS POLITICI-

ANS ANXIOUS TO PRESERVE A POLITICAL PLACE FOR THEMSELVES ON THE BOLLOTS.)

2. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SEVERAL SMALL BUT REAL INDICATIONS WITHIN THE PAST WEEK THAT MRS. GANDHI MAY INDEED CALL A SNAP ELECTION. ON SEPTEMBER 9, THE CONGRESS PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF A 22-MEMBER "CENTRAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE" TO PROSELYTIZE CONGRESS POLICIES AND PROGRAMS. DESPITE DENIALS FROM THE CONGRESS PRESIDENT, PRESS REPORTS HAVE SPECULATED THAT THE BODY IS REALLY THE CONGRESS ELECTION COMMITTEE WHICH IS USUALLY FORMED BY THE CONGRESS FIVE TO EIGHT MONTHS BEFORE EVERY GENERAL ELECTION. ANOTHER SMALL INDICATION WAS MRS. GANDHI'S SEPTEMBER 11 INSTRUCTIONS TO CONGRESS MPS TO ENSURE THAT THE ELECTORAL ROLLS IN THEIR CONSTITUENCIES ARE UP TO DATE. THE INSTRUCTION WAS GIVEN DURING A MEETING OF THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY CALLED TO COVER A VARIETY OF ISSUES. IT WAS QUICKLY PICKED UP BY THE PRESS AS ONE MORE SIGN THAT ELECTIONS ARE IMMINENT.

3. COMMENT: THERE ARE A NUMBER OF NOTABLE REASONS WHY MRS GANDHI MIGHT NOT CHOOSE TO CALL EARLY ELECTIONS. THE CONSTITUTIONALLY BASED REQUIREMENT THAT THE DELINEATION OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IN CONFORMITY WITH THE 1971 CENSUS BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTIONS WILL HAVE TO BE HONORED. PRESS REPORTS ON THE DELINEATION EXERCISE INDICATE TO US THAT PROGRESS WILL HAVE TO BE GREATLY ACCELERATED IF THE WORK IS TO BE COMPLETED BY

JANUARY OR FEBRUARY WHEN CANDIDATES WILL HAVE TO BE SELECTED IF ELECTIONS IN THE SPRING ARE TO BE HELD. FURTHER, THE CENTRAL POSITION THAT THE CONGRESS HAS ENJOYED SINCE INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONTINUED INEFFECTIVENESS OF INDIA'S SPLINTERED OPPOSITION ALMOST ENSURE THAT CONGRESS WILL WIN A MAJORITY IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS WHENEVER THEY ARE HELD. THE WAY MRS. GANDHI HANDLES HER UPCOMING CABINET RESHUFFLE (WHICH SOME KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES STATE WILL TAKE PLACE OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS) SHOULD PROVIDE A GOOD INDICATION OF HER INTENTIONS. A LIGHT RESHUFFLE, OR NONE AT ALL, COULD INDICATE THAT SHE IS READY TO GO TO THE COUNTRY SOON. A MAJOR RESHUFFLE WOULD INEVITABLE PRODUCE A BREAK IN CONTINUITY AND REQUIRE A PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT WHILE NEW POLICIES ARE FORMULATED AND LAUNCHED, THUS LESSENING PROSPECTS FOR AN EARLY ELECTION.

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 12253 131502Z

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